Participatory policy-making as a mechanism to increase the effectiveness of school policies against cyberbullying

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Abstract

This report builds on previous findings from the EMSOC project and aims to integrate the results from Work package 1: Inclusion with specific input from *task 1.1 Human-centered empowerment by inclusion* and *task 1.2 Multidimensional and inclusive regulatory strategies*. In particular, this deliverable builds upon the results of D.1.2.1 "*Regulatory trends in media - Identifying whether, what, how and who to regulate in social media*" (January 2012) which includes research into participation and consultation in the regulatory process and *D.1.1.4 "Preventing and coping with (cyber) bullying: Participatory mapping towards self-regulatory strategies*" (June 2013) where a user-centered approach was employed to gain insights from experts and school educational stakeholders in order to map existing strategies to prevent (cyber) bullying and cope with it in a class context.

In this report we refer to existing policies against cyberbullying around the world as well as in Flanders, we discuss their relevance and effectiveness and based on current research we extract best practices which are used to elaborate guidelines for the development of meaningful and effective school policies against cyberbullying. We believe that in order to be able to have a real impact school policies must take into consideration the individuality of each school ecosystem. This implies that school policies should be built and should evolve according to the specific needs of each school community. This can be achieved by providing schools with the necessary guidance to create, effectively implement and continuously improve their own school anti-cyberbullying policy. The final aim of this deliverable is to provide guidelines for both schools (micro level) and policy-makers (macro level) so that by means of a more participatory, user-centric approach to policy-making they will be able to build strong, coherent and effective policies to deal with cyberbullying at school.

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1. Introduction: Cyberbullying, its magnitude and its impact

Cyberbullying is usually defined in similar ways as traditional bullying. Take for example Smith`s widely used definition of cyberbullying as "an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, *using electronic forms of contact*, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" (Smith et al., 2008, p.376). There are, however, a number of features that distinguish online from offline bullying (e.g. Smith, Del Barrio and Tokunaga, 2013; Smith et al., 2008; Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2008, Tokunaga, 2010). These include (1) cyberbullying can potentially reach a larger audience, and (2) cyber bullies can be "anonymous" and physically "distant" from their victims making perpetrators less aware of the potential damage inflicted on victims (Smith et al., 2008; Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2008, Tokunaga, 2010).
As regards the prevalence of cyberbullying, it is difficult to compare results because different studies have used different definitions and types of measurement (see for instance Bauman, Cross, and Walker, 2013). Therefore, big disparities are observed across studies. While Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig & Ólafsson (2011, p.62) found that only 5% of European 9-16 year olds had been victim of cyberbullying (6% in Belgium), Hinduja & Patchin (2008) found that 33% of adolescent boys and 36% of adolescent girls had been bullied online. The same trend is observed in reviews of the cyberbullying literature (e.g. Kowalski, Limber & Agatston, 2008; Schrock & Boyd, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010) with victims of cyberbullying ranging from 4% to 46% and perpetrators between 11% and 33%. A recent study in Flanders, Belgium, shows that 30 per cent of 10- to 16-year-olds have been bullied offline at least once in the past 6 months and 11 per cent have been bullied online in the same period (Vandebosch et al, 2012). Moreover, 25 % admit having bullied others offline and 11 % having bullied others online (Vandebosch et al, 2012).

In spite of this, studies begin to reveal some consistency in the nature of the phenomenon. For instance, age is considered as an important factor affecting the incidence of cyberbullying. A peak (both as victim and perpetrator) is usually observed during adolescence somewhere between the age of 13 and 16 years old (Lampert & Donoso, 2012; Smith, 2012; Tokunaka, 2010; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Cleemput, Walrave & Mortelmans, 2006; Wolak et al., 2006). There is also a considerable overlap in the involvement of children in traditional (offline) bullying and cyberbullying (Smith, Del Barrio and Tokunaga, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin 2008, Gradinger, Strohmeier & Spiel, 2009; Steffgen, Pfetsch, König & Melzer, 2010). In fact, incidents of offline bullying (as perpetrator and/or victim) seem to be stronger predictors of cyberbullying as compared to other variables such as socio-demographics and psychological attributes (Lampert & Donoso, 2012).

Cyberbullying can take several forms: flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing and trickery, exclusion and cyber-stalking (Willard, 2005) and it can happen through different types of media (Slonje & Smith, 2008): mobile phone calls, text messaging, picture/video clip, e-mails; chatrooms, instant messaging (e.g. Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Snapchat), websites and online social networking platforms (e.g. Facebook or Twitter). As regards the impact of cyberbullying,

most studies have shown negative effects not only on victims, but also on class or school climate, learning environment and the health and well-being of families and communities. "Students can be afraid to come to school or go home, for fear of what awaits them on the internet" (Cassidy, Faucher and Jackson, 2013, p. 10). Cyberbullying can have similar negative effects as those of offline bullying (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a) having the "potential to inflict serious psychological, emotional, or social harm" (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006: 149). Among the many negative effects associated with cyberbullying we find depression, (social) anxiety, having negative social views of oneself (Dempsey, Sulkowski & Nichols, 2009; Hawker and Boulton 2000); embarrassment, fear and upset, as well as avoidance of the Internet (Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2006). School-related effects include school absence and lower grades (Willard, 2006; Beran & Li, 2007). Not surprisingly, cyber bullying has also been associated to both victims' and bullies' psychosocial maladjustment (Ybarra, Alexander, & Mitchell, 2003; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a; Ybarra & Mitchell 2004b).

The impact cyberbullying can have on a personal level depends not only individual characteristics (e.g. personality traits of bullies and victims, the capacity of the victim to cope with the incident, etc.), but also on other contextual factors such as the form of the cyber aggression, the media employed to inflict harm (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho & Tippett, 2006; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008) or the (social) support available for victims either at home, school or through their peers.

Considering the seriousness of cyberbullying and the negative impact it can have not only on its victims but also on the class and school community as a whole, it is important that specific strategies are developed and implemented in order to effectively deal with this specific form of aggression. It is also important to take into consideration that cyberbullying as well as other types of online risks can impact different children in different ways depending on the mechanisms they have at their disposal (e.g. consistent and effective school policies), the (personal) strategies employed to tackle the risks (e.g. more or less effective coping strategies), and the support they may (or may not) get from friends, siblings, parents, teachers or other trusted persons in their environment. Not all children are equipped with the necessary tools or have the social or family support needed to deal with cyberbullying on their own. This is why it is so important that schools are well-prepared to deal with these serious incidents so that they can help involved children (bullies, victims and bystanders) cope with cyberbullying in an effective and constructive way.

In the following sections of the report we will refer to existing policies against cyberbullying around the world (as well as in Flanders) and we will briefly discuss their relevance and effectiveness. Based on recent research we will extract best practices which will help us elaborate concrete guidelines for the development of meaningful and effective school policies against cyberbullying. We believe that in order to be able to have real impact school policies must take into consideration the individuality of each school ecosystem. This implies that school policies should be built and should evolve according to the specific needs of each school community. This can be achieved by providing schools with the necessary support to create, effectively implement and continuously improve their own school anti-cyberbullying policy. The final aim of this deliverable is to explore the ways in which a more participatory, user-centric approach to policy-making can help increase the effectiveness of policies to deal with cyberbullying at school.

2. Existing school-based strategies for coping with (cyber)bullying

It is difficult, if not impossible, to think about school policies or strategies to cope with cyberbullying without referring to existing policies that deal with traditional bullying. As research indicates there is a notable overlap between these two forms of aggression which calls for an integrated approach to dealing with them (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007; Campbell, 2005; Mason, 2008). Nevertheless, it is also important to keep in mind that in spite of the existing similarities between traditional and cyberbullying, there are also clear differences which should not be overlooked. We can, therefore, quite safely assume that even though many schools have traditional school policies in place to deal with (offline) bullying (Vandebosch, Poels & Deboutte (submitted)), these may not necessarily be completely appropriate to tackle the problem of cyberbullying (Salmivalli & Pöyhönen, 2012). One notable difference with traditional bullying is the fact that cyberbullying occurs often outside the school premises. This stresses, for instance, the importance of actively involving parents and other community actors in the fight against cyberbullying and more generally, the need for a "whole-school approach" (Samara & Smith, 2008) based on the cooperation of different types of actors (school staff, students, parents and the wider community) and including different types of actions (preventive, detective, reactive) (Vandebosch, Poels & Deboutte (submitted)). Preventive strategies, as the name indicates, are those actions aimed at preventing cyberbullying to happen in the first place. Detective strategies are about detecting or finding out about the incidence of cyberbullying. Reactive or curative actions have to do with finding a solution to the problem.

A content analysis of school anti-bulling policies in the UK (Smith et al., 2012) revealed that "many schools are still struggling to produce good policies […]It must be of concern that many schools do not yet mention cyberbullying, or homophobic or other kinds of identity-based bullying in their policies. It is of concern that many policies are restricted to pupils (rather than being really "whole-school"); and that so few mention responsibilities of non-teaching staff." (Smith et al., 2012, p. 69). Similar results are observed in Vandebosch, Poels & Deboutte`s study who observe that only in 18,4% of the Flemish schools in their sample had a written policy against cyberbullying.

In spite of the clear lack of appropriate, evidence-based policies to deal with cyberbullying, cyberbullying rates high on the policy makers agendas. This is observable in many existing awareness-raising initiatives at European level and worldwide. However, despite the increased attention to cyber abuse by the media and the public "there is a surprising and discouraging paucity of rigorous cyber abuse prevention and intervention evaluations. Additional research is vital to greater understanding in this important field" (Mishna et al., 2009: 35).
As opposed to cyberbullying, there is a much longer tradition of research regarding the effectiveness of bullying interventions and policies. Farrington and Ttofi (2009) carried out a systematic review and meta-analysis of the effectiveness of programs designed to reduce school bullying perpetration and victimization. According to the authors, existing programmes usually target youngsters (bullies, victims, bystanders), parents, teachers, and/or the broader school community and

they usually employ a combination of 20 different elements including whole-school anti-bulling policy, classroom rules and management, curriculum materials, school tribunals and courts or non-punitive methods, improved playground supervision, cooperative group work, school conferences, information for teachers and parents, teachers and parent training, videos and virtual reality computer games. They also found that the most important program elements that were associated with an effective decrease in both bullying and victimization were parent training/meetings, disciplinary methods, the duration and the intensity of the program for children and teachers. In general, the programs seemed to work better with older children. In spite of these findings the authors also acknowledge that many programs seem to have been based on common sense ideas about what might reduce bullying rather than on empirically-supported theories of why children bully, why children become victims, or why bullying events occur. Disregard the fact that many intervention programmes (still) miss a sound basis of empirical research on bullying behaviours, the authors found that many seem to be effective. They conclude that "in developing new policies and practices to reduce bullying, policy-makers and practitioners should draw upon high quality evidence-based programs that have been proved to be effective. New anti-bullying initiatives should be inspired by existing successful programs but should be modified in light of the key program elements that we have found to be most effective (or ineffective)." (Farrington and Ttofi, 2009, p. 69). The authors also recommend that a system of accrediting effective anti-bullying programs is developed, that new anti-bullying initiatives should go beyond the scope of the school and target wider systemic factors such as the family, and that programs should be intensive and long-lasting in order to have a real impact.

2.1 Strategies against Cyberbulling in Flanders

Vandenbosch, Poels & Deboute (submitted) carried out an online survey among 309 primary and secondary schools in Flanders to measure the schools` experience with cyberbullying, their perceived responsibility and (self) efficacy to deal with the issue, as well as their concrete preventive, detective and reactive strategies. Their study found out that a clear majority of schools (62%) is in need of concrete support and professional guidance when it comes to interventions against cyberbullying (Vandebosch, Poels & Deboutte submitted). The study also points out that even though most Flemish schools have some sort of preventive, detective and curative actions in place aimed at parents, pupils and/or teachers, they also feel insecure as regards whether their actions are the most appropriate ones. This is why schools would welcome evidence-based intervention programmes which provide free materials and tools which are easy to use, attractive and fun, but which can also reach a large number of students while fitting the existing curriculum and the available lesson times. Moreover, the tools should not require additional, time-consuming training from the school personnel who are most of the time already overloaded with work. Their study, one of the first of this type, also reveals that even though most schools are aware of relatively few cyberbullying incidents, they still find them problematic. They also feel that even though many of the online incidents of cyberbullying happen outside the school, it is the school's responsibility to tackle these issues and support students in finding solutions to the problem. This does pose, however, a number of challenges, because, as mentioned before, schools do not know if the strategies that

they are currently employing to fight cyberbullying are the most appropriate ones. This is why professional guidance as regards what strategies to implement and how to implement them is highly demanded by the schools in the sample.

Van den Bosch, Poels & Deboutte (submitted) propose a number of measures that could ensure an effective adoption, implementation and continuation of evidence-based anti-cyberbullying strategies at school. These include: taking into account the concerns raised by the school team, highlighting the positive results these strategies will bring, addressing the difficulties related to the implementation of such strategies and supporting teachers, through training and appropriate materials, so that they can feel that they do have the ability to implement these actions. Van den Bosch, Poels & Deboutte (submitted) go on to argue that anti-cyberbullying strategies should be embedded in a whole-school general anti-bullying programme which contemplates a wide spectrum of actors beyond the school (e.g. the police, social media providers, Internet service providers (ISPs), etc.). How these actors should concretely cooperate is not clear yet, though. For instance, should school and/or police be informed of cyberbullying incidents outside the school? How should they cooperate? Etc.

Finally, Van den Bosch, Poels & Deboutte (submitted) stress that not only educational policy makers but also those dealing with matters such as youth, ICT, justice and well-being should undertake, stimulate and coordinate actions to encourage schools to adopt evidence-based strategies to deal with cyberbullying. They recommend, for example, the taking up of legislative initiatives such as obliging schools to design anti-cyberbullying policies, or increasing the provision of technical and financial resources (e.g. project financing) as well as the promotion of awareness-raising campaigns at school.

3. Challenges and recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of school anti-cyberbullying policy

3.1 The need for a whole-school approach

Cyberbullying has gained enormous importance among educational stakeholders and the civil society (e.g. Hinduja & Patchin, 2008) probably as a result of increasing media attention and the enormous popularity of social networking sites and smartphones which allow children and young people to be connected everywhere increasing the opportunities for cyberbullying incidents. Another reason why cyberbullying is gaining more school attention is the fact that even though research has demonstrated that it usually occurs outside school (Agatson et al., 2007), its emotional effects, which can lead to increases in violence and truancy, and decreased academic performance (Beran & Li, 2005), extend to school obliging school personnel react and take action (Agatson et al., 2007). As mentioned above, many schools are unprepared to deal effectively with this new form of aggression. Other schools may simply be reticent to take action on behaviours that take place outside

the school walls (Feinberg & Robey, 2009, Ybarra et al., 2007). Adding to these challenges, school personnel and leaders, as well as policy makers, are often unsure of the most *effective* mechanisms to combat cyberbullying , i.e., in a way that actually reduces both its prevalence and negative effects (Beran & Li, 2007; Ybarra et al., 2007; Belsey, 2006;Van den Bosch, in press). Adding to this, many interventions strategies currently employed at schools have not been properly evaluated (Smith et al., 2008; Beran & Li, 2007). Therefore, notwithstanding an evident increase in cyberbullying awareness, more research is needed so that effective strategies for schools and school communities to prevent or reduce cyberbullying can be identified (Feinberg & Robey, 2009; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). In spite of this, even if specific strategies to prevent cyberbullying still need to be empirically evaluated to assess their effectiveness, there is plenty of evidence suggesting that the most effective way of tackling bullying at school is a '*whole-school approach*'. Because cyberbullying has a significant impact in schools, "combating cyberbullying is a mission that requires administrators, teachers, counsellors, parents, and students to work together to ensure that all students are afforded a safe and fear-free learning environment." (Beale & Hall, 2007, p.10). Thompson and Smith (2010, p.14) define whole-school approaches as "working with children and young people, parents, school staff and the whole school community to provide a solid foundation from which to embed developments and improvement in a systematic way". Typical elements of whole-school approaches to combating bullying include: school councils or assemblies, systems that support parent/carer involvement, (adult) modelling of positive relationships and communication, developing a restorative ethos and culture that supports the development of social and emotional skills, improving the school environment (i.e. buildings), assemblies, also local or national programmes such as the PSHEE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education)/Citizenship or the SEAL (Social Emotional Aspects of Learning) in England.

Thompson and Smith (2010) examined and assessed the effectiveness of the strategies English schools use to tackle episodes of bullying at school. They found that, among these strategies, (1) developing a restorative ethos and culture that supports the development of social and emotional skills and (2) the adult modelling of positive relationships and communication were given the highest rating on effectiveness. Another interesting finding was that initiatives that attempt to embed anti-bullying work in the curriculum seem effective but only under the condition that classes are given by enthusiastic staff. School assemblies were the most consistent method of delivering a whole-school message about anti-bullying while school councils were considered as an effective system for reporting problems in schools. Initiatives to involve parents were considered as essential, however some schools faced difficulties to engage parents.

As regards whole-school approaches, Thompson and Smith (2010) recommend that:

- Anti-bullying policies should include a *clear definition* of bullying and a *set of procedures* to follow in case an incident takes place. They should cover a range of bullying behaviour (e.g. homophobic, disability-based, faith-based, race-related and cyberbullying)

- The anti-bullying policy should act as a *guiding framework*. Therefore, all school staff, parents and pupils should be effectively informed about it.

- A *toolkit of strategies*, rather than a single one, is needed to provide a range of interventions. As all students and incidents are different, they may require a differentiated treatment too.

- The approach towards bullying should be *consistent*. This implies that a whole-school approach should be embedded in the school anti-bullying policy, staff should be trained, students briefed and pupils informed.

- *Staff training*, including knowledge about bullying and related anti-bullying interventions should be part of the teacher training programme (both initial and ongoing).

- Knowledge from the students about the levels and types of bullying is essential. This can be achieved by *auditing for bullying behaviour*.

- A variety of *reporting systems* for pupils and parents should be in place. These should be non-stigmatising and exposing. These reports should be acknowledged by schools and reporting individuals should be informed of the actions the school would take.

- A *centralized recording system* to identify vulnerable students at intake, track student behaviour and provide evidence for the effectiveness of interventions (e.g. peer support).

- *Permanent evaluation* of anti-bullying work with staff and students.

- *Evaluation of training providers and resources* is needed so that schools can make informed decisions regarding the services they want to employ.

3.2 What constitutes an effective policy against (cyber)-bullying?

Throughout this deliverable we have referred to several school-based strategies (preventive, detective, curative), programmes and interventions to deal with cyberbullying. We have highlighted a number of successful elements that have proven to be most effective when it comes to tackling cyberbullying at school, such as parents' trainings and meetings (Farrington and Ttofi, 2009) or the development of a restorative ethos and culture (Thompson and Smith, 2010). In order for these initiatives to succeed it is important that they are formalized through a clear school policy. Such policy should provide a framework for the whole school to prevent, detect and respond to (cyber) bullying (Smith et al., 2012). Developing an effective policy to combat bullying and, more particularly, cyberbullying, is not an easy task, however. We`ll summarize some of the most pressing challenges below:

1. *Work with experts.* Designing an anti-cyberbullying policy requires lots of knowledge regarding the programs, strategies and interventions that should be implemented. This requires cooperation with experts who may be in a better position to recommend specific interventions for specific schools. Indeed, there is evidence that cooperative group work among experts significantly relates to the reduction of both bullying and victimization (Farrington and Ttofi, 2009). Therefore, such cooperation should be encouraged.

2. *Need for high quality evidence-based programs*. In order to succeed school policies should be based upon high quality evidence-based programs that have been proved to be effective (Farrington and Ttofi, 2009).

3. *Fit to purpose.* Policies and its constituent elements (e.g. preventive or curative interventions) should respond to the specific needs of each school taking into account the specific characteristics of the school population, for instance pupils` age, gender, SES, etc. Apparently, different approaches seem to work better with specific groups. For instance, preliminary results from Farrington and Ttofi (2009)'s study suggest that disciplinary methods (the punitive approach) seem to work better for younger children, while non-punitive approaches seem to work better for older ones.

4. *Support and incentives from policy-makers*. Governments, related ministries and Departments of Education could provide powerful incentives to the school community in order to motivate schools to develop their own anti-cyberbullying policies. This could take different forms, for instance, the stipulation of specific requirements and the provision of concrete guidelines that facilitate the development of schools anti-cyberbullying polices within a pre-established framework. This would maximize the efficiency of existing policies as schools could be, for instance, required to include specific elements in their policies, but on the other hand, such frameworks would provide schools with enough information, but also freedom so that they can choose the strategies that better suit the specific needs of their school, its population and its surrounding community. For instance, in England the development of a school anti-bullying policy was recommended by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) anti-bullying pack Don`t Suffer in Silence (2002) and it has some legal force since the School Standard and Framework Act (SSFA) 1998, Section 61(4) and the Education and Inspections Act (EIA), Section 89(1)b, which stated that the behavior policy must be publicized and made known to all staff, pupils and parents at least once a year. It was recommended that the anti-bullying policy should be part of the overall school policy behavior, although schools could opt for having a separate anti-bullying policy (Smith et al., 2012).

5. *Provide guidance.* It is not enough to impose legal provisions that oblige school to write anti-bullying policies. Schools should, above all, be motivated, but also supported in this task. Providing schools with concrete guidance on how to design their own policies is crucial for several reasons. Among others, in order to ensure that a certain minimum quality level is achieved (minimum standards), to reduce the already fully workload of teachers and school personnel, but also to ensure that the right measures are taken by providing schools with the necessary information they need to make informed decisions regarding their policies. In other words, the guidance provided should act as an *enabling framework* that provides the necessary information schools need, which delimits the minimum content of the policy, but which also allows enough freedom so that individual schools can devise meaningful policies according to their specific realities (fit to purpose) (see Smith et al., 2012).

6. *Encourage a positive school climate.* A positive social climate within schools is a protective factor against bullying. In terms of content, school-based initiatives developed to reduce bullying behaviours should incorporate interventions designed to promote positive social interactions between students and teachers in particular, and between all members of the school community (Richard et al., 2011).

4. Participatory policy-making as a mechanism to increase the effectiveness of school policies against cyberbullying

Plenty of evidence points in the direction of a *whole-school approach* as one of the most important pre-requisites in order to successfully combat (cyber)-bullying at school (Samara & Smith, 2008). The importance of integrating all different educational stakeholders, but also the wider community in order to effectively deal with cyberbullying are well-documented. There is also some evidence (although not exhaustive) regarding what types of initiatives are most effective in dealing with this issue. However, little knowledge exists regarding the mechanisms necessary in order to design *meaningful* anti-bullying policies at school. In other words, there is knowledge regarding the form (whole-school), its requirements, (fit to purpose, providing guidance, etc.) and the content (preventive, detective and curative strategies) such policies should have, but not much is known as regards the mechanisms that should be in place in order for schools to be able to *develop* and *design* concrete, efficient and more participatory anti-bullying policies. By increasing stakeholders' participation early in the policy-making process we can (try to) ensure that the particularities of the different individuals involved, but also the specificities of each and every school, their culture and ecosystem can be taken into consideration. We believe that for a whole-school approach to be successful all community actors should actively contribute to the development of the policy itself and not just be *included* in the policy. In other words a whole-school anti-bullying policy should not only be *about* the whole school community but it should also be made *with* the active participation of all its members. However, too often, schools as well as educational policy makers lack the knowledge and/or the tools to ensure the active participation of all relevant stakeholders (including bullies, victims, but also parents and the wider community) while developing school policies against cyberbullying. Research on citizen participation in public policy making can be useful to illuminate this specific area (see Lievens et al., 2011). Indeed many of the guiding principles, but also challenges and limitations related to participatory policy-making can be extrapolated to the school situation. In the following section we will briefly refer to how a more participatory approach towards policy-making can serve enhance the effectiveness of school-based policies against cyberbullying.

4.1 Bringing models of citizen participation to enhance policy-making processes at the school: Pitfalls to avoid and guidelines

Citizens' involvement in policy-making has usually been carried out in the form of consultations, public hearings, citizen polls and other consultative mechanisms. Nevertheless, much criticism has been raised regarding the actual impact of citizen`s involvement in these processes and the way such consultations may have a real influence on policy decisions and development (Woodford and Preston, 2013). Public participation is conceived as essential to modern democracy and active citizenship offering a number of benefits including increasing democracy, fostering citizen and community capacity, and particularly, promoting responsive and effective policy decisions (Barnes et al, 2003). Nevertheless, ensuring the meaningful participation of citizens in consultation exercises is not straightforward. Woodford and Preston (2011) refer to six typical problems related to the experience of citizens as well as the impact of their input when it comes to their participation in policy-making consultations. These include one-way communication, infrequent feedback, limited involvement, poor representativeness, consultation being government controlled and consultation having little or no effect on policy decisions. These six aspects can easily be extrapolated to the design of school-based anti-(cyber)bullying policies at school. In the following section we will briefly discuss each of these pitfalls and will refer to possible ways of tackling them in a school-specific context.

1. *One-way communication:* Traditional consultation techniques usually involve one-way communication between citizens and government representatives with citizens sharing their views with government representatives or government officials informing citizens of government`s intended actions. However, no real dialogue takes place and citizens do not actively engage in the process with the consequent lack of opportunities to collectively find solutions to policy-related problems (Philips, 2001). In a similar fashion, it is important that in a school context students (including bullies, victims and bystanders), teachers and parents have opportunities to deliberate issues together with the school direction (rather than just being consulted on specific issues). Ideally, a more open and democratic dialogue would lead towards common agreements regarding the elements the policy should comprise and how to best implement them at school. In the specific case of policies against (cyber) bullying school directions and boards should bear in mind that a richness of information lies with the pupils themselves. However, due to the sensitiveness of the topic and also due to the lack of appropriate mechanisms to report (cyber) bullying incidents, many pupils simply do not share this valuable information with school authorities leaving school staff less aware of bullying incidents, especially online-based ones (Snakenborg, Van Acker, and Gable, 2011). It is essential, therefore, that schools provide the mechanisms for this sensitive type of information to flow. Only by having a realistic overview of the actual (cyber) bullying situation at school, will schools be able to devise a meaningful anti-bullying policy which will respond to the specific needs of the school community.

2. *Infrequent feedback:* Those who participate in consultation initiatives are almost never informed regarding how their input was used to inform policy decisions (Phillips, 2001). Therefore, it is recommended that school policy makers provide concrete, formal feedback regarding how input from the different school actors was actually integrated into the anti-bullying policies developed. This implies that not only school personnel, schools psycholo-

gists and pupils are informed, but also parents and other members of the community. Considering the heterogeneity of the school community including diverse ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, communication towards the whole school community should be simple, clear, brief and straightforward highlighting very concretely how the contributions from the different actors have been (or are being) integrated into the concrete policy elements. Providing feedback is important because the permanent engagement of the whole-school can only be guaranteed if the different actors feel that their contributions are valued and that their voices are heard.

3. *Limited involvement:* Consultation methods tend to limit citizen participation to specific stages of policy creation (Phillips and Orsini, 2002), usually by allowing them to provide input at the beginning or feedback at the end of the consultation process. This obviously limits citizens' participation when they are not able to take part in other crucial stages of the policy development. In the case of schools, it is recommended that representative actors of all the school stratums are actively involved throughout the whole anti-bullying policy design process as well as during the policy assessment instances. By doing this it is possible to safeguard that the policies developed are the result of a collaborative effort and its results are *meaningful* to all actors involved in the process.

4. *Poor representativeness:* Even though it is usually recommended that consultation processes are representative and that no groups are purposively excluded from the process, some authors suggest a tendency for only participants with "acceptable" viewpoints to be invited (Abele et al., 1998). In a school context, and certainly in the case of sensitive policies such as cyberbullying representativeness may further be hindered by the fact that extremely relevant stakeholders such as bullies or victims as well as school minorities (physically or mentally disabled children, ethnic minorities, etc.) may not exactly be the type of pupils who would easily volunteer for such a task. In the case of parents, practical problems which may hinder participation include the fact that many may be unable to attend these types of meetings because of work-related obligations or incompatible schedules. Also, in the case of some children of foreign origin, language issues may also hinder communication. Therefore, special cautiousness and attention should be given to ensuring school population representativeness by, for example, inviting children and teachers with different points of view and from different backgrounds to participate, but also by providing the right context so that parents can also be present (e.g. evening meetings, providing translation, if necessary, etc.).

5. *Government controlled:* Traditional consultations have been criticized because of being controlled by governments, i.e. governments usually decide the focus of consultations, their format, the questions to be asked and whom to consult. Governments also determine how the input gathered may (or may not) influence policy (Wyman et al., 2000; Phillips, 2001; Phillips and Orsini, 2002), therefore limiting and determining the focus of citizens' input (Woodford and Preston, 2013). In a school-context it would be advisable to employ participatory and user-centered approaches to gather the views of a wide spectrum of community

members so that an honest, open and transparent dialogue can take place among participants. This is of utmost importance especially when delicate issues such as (cyber) bullying are discussed. Moreover, considering the imbalance of power, typical of school hierarchies, it is important to devise mechanisms that can help students and parents (i.e. the whole school population) engage in the process by making them feel their contributions are heard and do matter. Ensuring more participatory approaches towards policy-making will also enable these different actors, especially those in a weaker power position, to exercise considerable power during the discussion itself and will give them the opportunity to have a bigger impact on the policy co-creation process.

6. *Little or no effect on policy decisions:* As regards traditional consultation processes there is a common perception that these processes have little or no effect on policy-making (Wyman et al., 2000; Phillips, 2001; Phillips and Orsini, 2012) while others see consultation as either a mere "window-dressing" (Abele et al., 1998, p.7) or simply as a tactic to delay substantial policy change (Torjman, 1998). These far from positive views seem to lie partly on the fact that governments are not obliged to consider or act based on the results of consultations (Smith, 1998). In other words it is not enough to provide citizens with a venue to express their opinions because simply providing such a venue is not guarantee of real participation in the policy-making process (Woodford and Preston, 2013). Similarly, in the case of schools, the mere consultation of a wide variety of stakeholders will not ensure the effectiveness of a whole-school approach to combat cyberbullying. Considering the views of the different school actors should go beyond providing some feedback to the content of policies. Above all, anti-bullying school policies should be thought, designed, implemented and evaluated in ways that foster the iterative and permanent engagement and active participation of all the school actors involved.

4.2 How to concretely foster whole-school participation in the design process of school-based anti-bullying policies? Incorporating insights form participatory and user-centred design

As described in the previous section, traditional policy-making processes have been marked by the lack of engagement and real participation of different stakeholders. Top-down consultation rather than collaborative dialogue has dominated the shaping of public policies. Similar processes are observed at school with school directions dominating largely the design of policies as is the case many existing anti-bullying policies at school. Van den Bosch, Poels and Deboutte (submitted) point out that in most schools in Flanders (71%) it is the school principal who is responsible for the development of a policy against cyberbullying and traditional bullying (approx. 80% of the cases). School principals mention, though, that they are usually supported in this task by other members of the school team such as school psychologists and teachers, but also sometimes, in the specific case of cyberbullying, by the staff member who is responsible for ICT. Strikingly, no school mentioned the involvement of pupils or parents in the development of their anti-(cyber) bullying policies, however pupils, but also teachers and parents are the target of such policies. Also surprisingly is the fact that only 18.4% of schools have formalized their policy against cyber-bullying in written form. Schools, however, do claim to organize different types of activities to combat (cyber) bully-

ing. These activities usually target pupils and teachers, but also in some cases parents. These findings highlight big inconsistencies: On the one hand, schools claim to develop anti-bullying policies that target the whole-school, but on the other hand, these policies are basically developed by the school principals supported in some cases by a few members of the school team who, as research points out, are not necessarily the stakeholders better informed when it comes to incidents of (cyber) bullying at school. It is evident from VandenBosch, Poels and Deboutte`s research that imperative changes are needed in order for Flemish schools to be able to eradicate, or at least, effectively diminish the incidence of (cyber) bullying at their schools. One step forward in this direction would be the improvement of the existing schools mechanisms to increase pupils and parents' participation in the design and implementation of school-based anti-bullying policies. The active involvement of other stakeholders such as the local police, ISPs, youth helplines, academics or other experts in the field of cyberbullying may also be desirable although it may require additional non-school-driven strategies, such as the creation of higher-level incentives, for instance from the Ministry of Education or other governmental bodies, which may require/motivate these societal actors to take a more pro-active role in the fight against cyberbullying.

Few authors have referred to the ways in which whole-school policies should be elaborated and designed in the first place. We believe that one possible way of dealing with this issue is by employing not only *user-centered*, but also *participatory* approaches to the policy-making process. By means of such an approach we can foster the active engagement (rather than the mere consultation) of a wide spectrum of educational actors in the process. Different methods and techniques can serve this purpose including in-depth interviews, focus groups or action research with relevant stakeholders. In particular, the EMSOC project is exploring the usefulness of the MAP-it tool, a hands-on tool for participatory cartography and conversation (Dreessen et al, 2011). MAP-it was developed as a means to open up communication more effectively. It consists of a large mapping background and an open and extendible set of icons that allows participants to make their thoughts explicit in a visual way, in the form of a map. The visual character of mapping allows participants from different backgrounds to discuss topics on equal grounds, which is extremely important in the case of a school ecosystem where power tends to be unevenly distributed among its members. Moreover, the mapping´s structure encourages to not only share positive experiences, but also leads to critique and debate (Dreessen et al, 2011).

MAP-it fits perfectly within the broader Participatory Design approach explored by EMSOC research. In Participatory Design, users and other stakeholders participate in the design process to ensure that the resulting designs fit the way people will actually use the product in their own lives (Schuler, 1993). What distinguishes participatory design from related approaches such as user-centered design is that the latter supposes only that the research and design work is done on behalf of the users: in participatory design, this work must be done with the users from beginning to end (Iivari, 2004; Spinuzzi, 2004). The participatory design notion can be particularly useful to the design process of school-based policies to combat cyberbullying which, as literature emphasizes, should be tailored to the specific needs of the school community, the characteristics of the actors involved as well as to the types of cyberbullying incidents the policy should try to respond to. In deliverable D1.1.4, the first step of a Participatory Design project on combating (cyber) bullying was presented. The goal of this participatory design project is to provide teachers with a (digital)

toolkit to help young children (9- to 10- year olds) to become more self-regulatory as a class group in preventing and coping with traditional bullying as well as cyberbullying. By means of mapping sessions with experts and teachers using the MAP-it tool, a set of preconditions for effectively combating (cyber) bullying were identified as well as suggestions for facilitating such preconditions. The results of this research indicate possible roads to follow as well as dangers and opportunities which can impact the design process of the toolkit. In the next phase of the project, children`s views will be collected in order to continue enhancing the toolkit model developed so that it really responds to actual expectations and needs from different, relevant actors in the field. Interestingly, the first steps of this Participatory Design project already bring to light some interesting results regarding the views of different stakeholders as to what strategies should be developed and implemented at schools. For instance, *prevention* strategies should be fostered in such a way that they are structured on different levels ranging from the broad societal context to prevention measures targeted at very specific problems. The role of teachers was also emphasised. They should support children in becoming more self-regulatory in combating (cyber) bullying. Children, on their turn, should be encouraged to become *emotionally literate.* This would be achieved by enhancing empathy, developing social skills and making them more resilient. Schools should not only prevent, but also deal with specific cyberbullying incidents, therefore concrete prevention measures such as teaching children how to manage privacy settings online or role-playing games to teach victims and bystanders to react to bullying behaviour in concrete ways were also valued.

In the next phases of the EMSOC project a toolkit for schools will be developed. According to the views from the stakeholders involved in the participatory design sessions, the toolkit should be integrated into a multi-layered, whole-school approach, targeting the individual, class and general school level as well as parents throughout the trajectory. A tool that should definitely be included in the toolkit according to the participants is a 'social questionnaire' to map group dynamics and to monitor how everyone feels in the group. This way, it will be much easier to detect tensions within the group and to prevent them from growing into acute (bullying) problems. Also needed are tools to build 'symmetrical trust' between teachers and their students, allowing teachers to gain more insight into what happens beneath the surface of the group, offline as well as online. Since bullying is a group process in which bystanders have an effect on the persistence of bullying, the toolkit should further facilitate children to make their own engagements about how they can improve the class atmosphere (i.e. broad prevention) and how they can help victims when bullying nevertheless occurs (i.e. intervention or problem-solving). Peer sensitizing, in which some children, most likely the popular ones, take the lead in sensitizing other children about safe internet use and what they can do about (cyber)bullying, was also mentioned a few times. Importantly, a broad-spectrum toolkit should not be mistaken for a one-size-fits-all approach. The tools should be open and adaptable, and designed for structural, long-term use. For profound and enduring change to take place, it is furthermore important for the toolkit to be built upon a 'no blame' philosophy. In sum, a shift in the whole school culture may be needed for a bottom-up approach towards combating (cyber) bullying to succeed.

5. Dealing with cyberbullying on a macro level: Recommendations for policy makers

As we have discussed throughout this report cyberbullying is a complex problem that poses dilemmas not only for schools and parents but also for policymakers, judicial systems and the wider society including ministries of education, the industry, NGO`s, etc. Despite the attention given to cyberbullying in the two last decades, the policy vacuum persists as to how to prevent and reduce this form of online violence (Patwalia, 2012). In countries such as the US, for instance, governments are being demanded to introduce harsher laws to address cyberbullying. As a result, some governments have begun to enact legislation that allows schools to take measures against cyber bullies or to make cyberbullying punishable under criminal law. However, some argue that harsh legislation and punitive action on their own may not be the best effective solution; instead, they can create more obstacles for youth, and allow stakeholders to avoid responsibility for educating youth and fostering digital citizenship (Patwalia, 2012). Still, we believe that law enforcement has an important role to play in the fight against cyberbullying. In the following sections we will refer to concrete laws that can be applicable in the case of cyberbullying, but we will also discuss their potential limitations. Finally, we will refer to principles of self and co-regulation (see Lievens et al., 2011) and how these could impact the fight against cyberbullying.

5.1 How law enforcement can help combat cyberbullying

5.1.1 Laws applicable to cyberbullying

Online or social networking environments are not situated in a legal vacuum. There are existing (national) laws that may be applicable to cyberbullying behaviour or acts in these environments.

In Belgium, a first provision that may be applicable is article 145 §3bis of the Act of 13 June 2005 on electronic communications which criminalises 'harassment by electronic communication means'. Different elements must be present in order for this article to be applicable. First, the harassment must be done by electronic means, this includes the Internet and SNS. Second, the perpetrator must have the intention to harass, and third, the harassment must be done vis-à-vis a 'correspondent'. This implies that there must be some form of interaction between the perpetrator and the target (Walrave et al., 2009).

The Belgian Criminal Code also contains a number of provisions that may applicable to bullying in social networks. In addition to article 383, 384, 386 and 383bis which may be applicable to cyberbullying instances which include the use of sexual(ly suggestive) photographs, article 422bis of the Criminal Code may also be applied to bullying. This article punishes persons who menace an individual, while they knew or should have known that through their behaviour they would seriously disturb the peace of that individual. Moreover, the article specifies that if the targeted individual is particularly vulnerable because of a.o. age the punishment is doubled. Four conditions must be ful-

filled to be able to apply the article: menacing or harassing behaviour, a serious disturbance of the peace of the targeted individual, a causal link between the first two elements and the fact that the perpetrator knew or should have known that this behaviour would cause the disturbance. The crime can only be prosecuted if a complaint has been lodged.

It is also possible that cyberbullying in the online or social networking environment is classified as libel or defamation. Article 443 of the Criminal Code considers that a person who maliciously charges someone of a certain fact, which may offend his honour or may expose him to public contempt, and which is not legally proven, is guilty of libel if the charge is not proven, or defamation when the law does not allow this proof. Article 444 Criminal Code determines the punishment (imprisonment and fine) that will be applied when the charges occur (1) in public meetings or places; or (2) in the presence of several individuals in a place which is not public, but nevertheless accessible to a number of individuals which have the right to meet or visit; or (3) wherever, in the presence of the offended individual and witnesses; or (4) by means of writings, printed or not, by means of pictures or symbols, which are posted, distributed or sold, being offered for sale or publicly exhibited; or (5) by means of writings which have not been made public, but which have been sent or communicated to several individuals.

It has been argued that defamation and libel on the Internet may fall within the scope of article 443 and 444 of the Criminal Code (Uyttendaele, 2002). In addition, article 448 of the Criminal Code punishes persons who offend or insult someone by means of writings or images. The perpetrator must have a malicious intent and the insult must be public (according to article 444, supra) (Walrave et al., 2009).

Finally, in certain cases it may be possible that cyberbullying involves acts of hacking (article 550bis Criminal Code), sending of viruses (article 550ter Criminal Code) or forgery by means of informatics (article 210bis, para. 2 Criminal Code) (Walrave et al., 2009), or if images are used, that a violation of the right to image or the right to privacy occurs.

5.1.2 Why legal provisions alone will not put an end to cyberbullying

A number of existing legislative provisions may in theory be applicable to cases of cyberbullying . In Belgium, most of these provisions are formulated in a technology-neutral manner, which implies that they may be applied in an online or social networking environment. It might thus appear that there is no need for new legislation to address this issue (Lievens, 2012). However, this does not mean that the application of the articles may not be confronted with obstacles. Problems that may arise are, for instance, the potential anonymity of perpetrators and the fact that the majority of popular online services providers are located abroad, hindering effective enforcement of the national legislative provisions (infra). Moreover, some authors argue that "litigious efforts against individual perpetrators of harm will not prove to be the solution for a complex and multifaceted issue such as cyberbullying" (Retter, 2012). Emphasis should, therefore, also be put on trying to understand why young people in today's society are not equipped with the ethical barometer necessary

to understand that cyberbullying causes pain (Retter, 2012) and finding ways to effectively diminish the incidence of cyberbullying, for instance, by developing appropriate social skills among school students and by enhancing the school climate. According to Boyd and Palfrey (2012), "not only are most young people often ill-equipped to recognize how their meanness, cruelty, and pranking might cause pain, but most adults are ill-equipped to help young people in a productive way". Retter (2012) goes on to argue that "we cannot forget that perpetrators of cyber-harm are often victims themselves of bullying and other forms of peer pressure" for instance, ethnic or other types of minorities who are excluded for no other reason than their perceived differences. We must be conscious, therefore, that legal provisions alone are probably not the best approach towards dealing with cyberbullying. Legal provisions are necessary, but they are only one of the many elements that should be present in order to guarantee the success of broader intervention strategies against cyberbullying. As Retter (2012) rightly stresses "the answer to combating cyberbullying today will not [...] come down to suing individual students like Ravi [Dharum][1]. In fact, the solution lies entirely outside of the legal realm (...). Solutions to bullying which focus on punishment, and not for instance, holistic and comprehensive education, put a band-aid on the underlying problem." Indeed, zero-tolerance approaches to bullying exacerbate the problem rather than to solve it (Boyd and Palfrey, 2012). Furthermore, anti-bullying initiatives should focus both on perpetrators and victims of bullying as well as on other members of the community. What is needed are projects with "serious social, economic, and time-based commitment[s] to educating both young people and adults." (Retter, 2012) With this in mind, we should concentrate on identifying, developing and implementing mechanisms that can prevent cyberbullying from occurring in the first place, rather than focusing on how cyberbullying behaviour should be punished. Harsh legislation and punitive action on their own may not be the most effective solution; instead, they may allow stakeholders to avoid the responsibility of educating youth and fostering digital citizenship (Patwalia, 2012). This does not mean, however, that the legal system does not have a role to play. On the contrary, a well-thought, clear, unambiguous, and well-communicated legal framework may, indeed, be a great support to the development of anti-bullying initiatives at school.

5.2 Dealing with cyberbullying on a macro-level: How co-regulation could help combat cyberbullying

Co-regulation is a regulatory strategy which consists of elements of state regulation and elements of self-regulation (Lievens et al., 2011). Such a strategy entails that different stakeholders are involved in the co-regulatory process: on the one hand, the state, and on the other, a number of industry actors, and possibly users, consumers or NGOs as well. On the one hand, it has been argued that the adoption of co-regulatory strategies may provide an answer to the documented shortcomings of traditional legislation in an online environment which is global and decentralised by nature.

[1] On March 16, 2012, Dharun Ravi — the former Rutgers University student accused of spying on his roommate, Tyler Clementi — was found guilty of privacy invasion, tampering with evidence, and bias intimidation. The jury verdict was praised around the world because the decision was seen as a symbol for an end to cyberbullying (Retter, 2012).

On the other hand, in comparison to self-regulation, which has often been criticised as being unsatisfactorily enforced or being not transparent or accountable enough, co-regulation might provide better safeguards with regard to the achievement of public interest goals and the protection of fundamental rights (such as the protection of minors, freedom of expression, etc.). This is especially the case with regard to delicate issues, where different interests must be weighed up. Cyberbullying might be such an issue. It is important to address cyberbullying from multiple angles, especially when it occurs in specific environments, such as online social networks. The blurring between 'public' and 'private' in online social networks, the invisibility of audiences and the fact that information in such networks is persistent, replicable, searchable, and visible on a large scale (Boyd, 2008) entail that risks, such as cyberbullying, are significantly more complex compared to equivalent offline risks. Co-regulatory strategies, in which different actors – such as the state, industry, parents and educators – cooperate and in which the use of technology and empowerment mechanisms (such as media literacy and education) can be incorporated, may present a sophisticated manner to deal with this increasingly problematic issue. Such an approach would also better fit the whole-school philosophy suggested throughout this report which aims at incorporating different school actors, but also the wider community in the design of more effective anti-cyberbullying policies.

6. Conclusion

In order to benefit from the positive aspects of the Internet (e.g. learning, communication and entertainment), all children have the right to access digital media as a means of exercising their right to freedom of expression and information (see article 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). However, it is essential that policymakers and educators take steps to ensure that in these digital environments opportunities are maximised and risks are minimised. Because of the multidimensional aspects of cyberbullying, but also because it deals with many different types of stakeholders (pupils, teachers, parents, the industry, government representatives, etc.) it is important that policies to combat it consider its unique characteristics and the challenges these pose. As research has demonstrated, in order to be able to have a real impact school policies must take into consideration the individuality of each school ecosystem. This implies that school policies should be built and should evolve according to the specific needs of their community. This can be achieved by providing schools with the necessary support to create, effectively implement and continuously improve their own school anti-cyberbullying policy. Throughout this deliverable we have referred to several school-based strategies (preventive, detective, curative), programmes and interventions to deal with cyberbullying in a more effective way. We have highlighted a number of elements that have proven to be most effective when it comes to tackling cyberbullying at school (e.g. parents' trainings and meetings, the development of a restorative ethos and culture). In order for these initiatives to succeed it is essential that they are embedded and formalized in concrete (written) school policies. Such policies should provide a framework to prevent, detect and respond to (cyber) bullying. Developing an effective policy to combat bullying and, more particularly, cyberbullying, is not an easy task. It demands considerable knowledge regarding the programs,

strategies and interventions to be implemented. This is why the permanent cooperation with experts is recommended. Furthermore, in order to succeed school policies should be based upon high quality evidence-based programs that have been proved to be effective. Policies and its constituent elements (e.g. preventive or curative interventions) should respond to the specific needs of each school taking into account the specific characteristics of the school population, for instance pupils` age, gender, SES, etc. In order to achieve all these goals, support and incentives from educational policy-makers are necessary. Providing schools with concrete guidance on how to design their own policies is crucial in order to ensure that a certain minimum quality level is achieved (minimum standards). This guidance should act as an enabling framework that provides the necessary knowledge schools need to make informed decisions regarding what strategies to implement as well as the minimum requirements the policy should fulfil.

Even though there is plenty of knowledge regarding the form (whole-school), its requirements, (fit to purpose, providing guidance, etc.) and the content (preventive, detective and curative strategies) school-based policies against cyber-bullying should have, not much is known as regards the mechanisms that should be in place in order for schools to be able to *develop* and *design* concrete and efficient anti-bullying policies. By increasing stakeholder's participation early and throughout the whole policy-making process we believe that the particularities of the different stakeholders involved, but also the specificities of each and every school, their culture and its members can be taken into consideration. For a whole-school approach to be successful all community actors should actively contribute to the development of the policy itself instead of just being *included* as targets of the policy. In other words a whole-school anti-cyberbullying policy should not only be *about* the whole school community but it should also be made *with* the active participation of all its members. Only by means of a truly participatory, user-centric approach to policy-making schools and policy-makers will be able to build strong, coherent and effective policies to tackle this complex online risk.

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8. Dutch summary

Dit rapport integreert de onderzoeksresultaten van het CUO en ICRI binnen het werkpakket rond inclusie met een focus op cyberpesten. Om optimaal gebruik te kunnen maken van de positieve aspecten van het internet gebruik te kunnen maken (zoals leren, communiceren en entertainment), moeten alle kinderen het recht hebben op toegang tot digitale media, om zo hun recht op vrijheid van meningsuiting en toegang tot informatie te kunnen uitoefenen (zie artikel 13 van het Internationaal Verdrag inzake de Rechten van het Kind). Het is echter van cruciaal belang dat beleidsmakers en onderwijsinstellingen initiatieven nemen om ervoor te zorgen dat in de digitale media omgeving opportuniteiten gemaximaliseerd en risico's geminimaliseerd worden.
Cyberpesten heeft multidimensionale aspecten omdat er verschillende partijen bij betrokken zijn (leerlingen, leraren, ouders, de sector, overheid, etc.). Daarom is het belangrijk dat beleid rond cyberpesten deze unieke kenmerken en de daar bijhorende uitdagingen mee in rekening neemt. Onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat, om een echte impact te kunnen hebben, bij het uitwerken van een dergelijk beleid de eigenheid van iedere schoolomgeving mee in overweging moet genomen worden. Dit houdt in dat het beleid op scholen zo moet worden opgesteld dat het mee kan evolueren met de noden van de schoolgemeenschap. Dit kan bereikt worden door scholen de nodige ondersteuning te geven zodat zij een beleid kunnen creëren dat effectief geïmplementeerd wordt en continu verbeterd kan worden. In dit rapport kwamen verschillende strategieën (preventief, onderzoekend, curatief), programma's en interventies aan bod om op een meer effectieve manier met cyberpesten om te gaan. We hebben enkele elementen uitgelicht waarvan aangetoond is dat zij het meest effectief zijn om met cyberpesten op school om te gaan (zoals trainingen voor ouders, vergaderingen, het ontwikkelen van een herstellende ethos en cultuur). Om van deze initiatieven een succes te maken is het essentieel dat zij ingebed zijn en geformaliseerd zijn in een concreet (geschreven) schoolbeleid. Een dergelijk beleid zou een kader moeten voorzien om cyberpesten te voorkomen, te detecteren en aan te pakken. Een beleid ontwikkelen om (cyber)pesten aan te pakken is niet gemakkelijk. Het vraagt een uitgebreide kennis van de programma's, strategieën en interventies die geïmplementeerd moeten worden. Daarom wordt samenwerking met experten aangeraden. Om te slagen zou een schoolbeleid bovendien gebaseerd moeten zijn op programma's van hoge kwaliteit waarvan al bewezen is dat ze doeltreffend zijn. Het beleid en de verschillende elementen ervan (zoals preventieve of curatieve interventies) zou moeten beantwoorden aan de specifieke noden van de schoolbevolking, zoals de leeftijd, het geslacht, SES, etc. Om deze doelstellingen te bereiken zijn ondersteuning en incentivisering vanuit het onderwijsbeleid noodzakelijk. Scholen concreet begeleiden in het opstellen van hun eigen beleid is cruciaal om te verzekeren dat een bepaald minimum kwaliteitsniveau wordt bereikt (minimumstandaarden). Deze begeleiding moet functioneren als een stimuleren kader dat de nodige kennis levert aan scholen om geïnformeerde beslissingen te kunnen nemen voor wat betreft de te implementeren strategieën en de minimumvereisten van hun beleid rond cyberpesten.

Hoewel er veel kennis rond de vorm (de hele school / '*whole-school*'), de vereisten (aangepast aan het doel, leiding, etc.) en de inhoud (preventief, onderzoekend, curatief), is er nog niet veel kennis rond de mechanismen waarmee scholen een concreet en efficiënt beleid rond cyberpesten kunnen

ontwikkelen. Door de verschillende partijen van in het begin en in heel het beleidsproces te betrekken zijn wij ervan overtuigd dat er rekening gehouden kan worden met de karakteristieken van iedere partij en de eigenheid van iedere school. Om succesvol te kunnen zijn moet een schoolbereid rond cyberpesten alle actoren actief betrekken in de ontwikkeling ervan in plaats van ze enkel als een doelgroep van het beleid te beschouwen. Met andere woorden, een schoolbeleid rond cyberpesten moet niet enkel over de schoolgemeenschap gaan het moet ook ontwikkeld worden met de actieve inbreng van alle leden van de gemeenschap. Alleen met een echt participatieve, op de gebruiker gerichte benadering kunnen scholen en beleidsmakers een sterk, coherent en effectief beleid uitwerken rond dit complex online risico.